DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 579 PS 016 403

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TITLE Social Development of Infants and Toddlers in Japanese Day Care.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Infant Studies (Los Angeles, CA, April 10-13, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *Cultural Influences; Foreign Countries; *Infants; Preschool Education; *Social Behavior; *Social Development; *Toddlers
IDENTIFIERS *Japan

ABSTRACT

To examine children's patterns of social interaction in group care, the activities and verbal behavior of 50 preschool children attending 5 Japanese day care centers in metropolitan Tokyo were observed and recorded during a total of 20 minutes of free play for each child. Participants were equally dispersed across five age categories each encompassing 6 months and collectively extending from 6 months to 3 years of age. Observations made in 10-minute blocks were recorded at 30-second intervals. Five mutually exclusive categories comprising a heirarchical ordering of involvement were used to code the data: "solitary," "watches," "parallel play," "interaction," and "interchange." Results indicated that, in the "watches" category, the youngest group had significantly higher scores than those in either of the two oldest groups. The frequency of "parallel play" among the youngest was significantly lower than for all other age groups. Children from 12 to 36 months of age were found to spend significantly more time engaged in parallel play than were infants under the age of 1 year. Children as young as 12- to 18-months-old were spending approximately one-fifth of their time in parallel play. It is concluded that, while this finding can be explained in part by developmental considerations, culture or environment appeared to be a contributing factor. (RH)

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN JAPANESE DAY CARE

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Presented at
International Conference of Infant Studies
April 12, 1986
Los Angeles, California

What is the quality of the time spent by infants and toddlers in day care? With an increasing number of children under the age of three spending long days in group care, concern about the quality of time in such settings becomes significant in light of contemporary research documenting the importance of these early years. Important indicators of quality time are the nature of the patterns of social interaction which predominate and the nature of the activities in which the children are engaged in day care settings. The present paper will examine children's patterns of social interaction in Japanese group care, while a companion article will report findings regarding the nature of play observed.

Although a number of researchers have explored aspects of social development of young children, application to the day care setting have been limited by several factors. First, some of the early research on social development of the young child utilized

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institutional settings where large groups of children were available (e.g., Bridges, 1933; Maudry & Nekula, 1939). Qualitative differences exist in the socialization of children in 24-hour institutionalized settings as compared to those in day care settings during the working hours of their parents, limiting the generalizability of these early findings. Second, some studies have examined social interactions between acquainted or unacquainted toddler dyads but in contrived settings (Eckerman, Whatley & Kutz, 1975; Hay, Nash & Pederson, 1983; Maudry & Nekula, 1939). It is unclear whether or not such data resemble the naturally unfolding patterns of interaction in settings such as day care. Finally, many of the studies conducted in naturalistic settings have focused narrowly, e.g., attachment to the caregiver (Farran, Burchinal, Hutaff & Ramey, 1984; Wilcox, Staff & Romaine, 1980) and/or the frequency of interactions (Farran, Burchinal, Hutaff & Ramey, 1984; Holmberg, 1980; Mueller & Brenner, 1977).

Japanese educational practices have recently been subjected to much scrutiny by Americans seeking to understand the high academic achievement of Japanese students (e.g., Stevenson, Azuma & Hakuta, 1986). This examination has included the preschool years (e.g., Lewis, 1984). The present study is part of a research effort on Japanese day care initiated in the late

1970's. Previous research established that while Japanese and American day care centers share many commonalities, a crucial difference centered on differing cultural values which were being transmitted even from infancy (Shigaki, 1983). It was found, for example, that day care practices were influenced by such prominent Japanese values as the importance of the group and interdependence. This recognition of the importance of the cultural context provides a framework for interpretation of data.

Method

Subjects

Children were selected from five Japanese day care centers in the metropolitan Tokyo area. The centers enrolled children from predominately middle-class families. While random selection was not employed, caregivers were consulted to eliminate any children who had difficulty adjusting to the day care environment or who exhibited pronounced developmental delays. A total of 50 children were observed, 10 each from the age spans 6-12 months, 12-18 months, 18-24 months, 24-30 months and 30-36 months. Half of the subjects in each age group were boys and half were girls.

Procedures

An adaptation of the "target child" methodology described by Sylva, Roy and Painter (1980) was utilized for the study. The methodology consists of following one child's activities during a prescribed time period. A running account of both an activity record as well as a language record is made, with 30 second intervals noted using a stop watch. While the language record did not always consist of a verbatim account, the essence of the conversation was recorded. This was made possible through detailed shorthand notes made by the observer transcribed the same day. The methodology permitted a relatively unobtrusive observer to chart a child's activities while keeping the effect of the observer to a minimum. As the focus of the study was on the nature of play and the social interactions which normally occur at that time, observations were made during play periods rather than scheduled time devoted to activities such as feeding, napping, or toileting. Given the ages of the children and depending upon the activity, however, routines such as toileting or hand washing occasionally were observed during the formal observations

The children observed by Sylva, Roy and Painter ranged in age from three-and-a-half to five-and-a-half years old which permitted observations in 20-minute blocks. The children for the present study were

considerably younger, from six months to age three. For comparative purposes it was desirable to maintain time blocks of the same duration across the observed age span. Therefore, observations were made for 10-minute blocks. Complete play bouts were observed which often extended beyond the 10-minute period. However, the core of the data are comprised of the formal 10-minute observations. Each child was observed twice usually on successive days. The data were gathered over a three-and-a-half months period in the spring of 1983.

Scoring of Protocols

Data were coded utilizing five mutually exclusive categories as follows: Solitary (absorbed in play by self), Watches (watches people or events), Parallel Play (nature of play similar to those nearby, but with no exchanges), Interaction (brief exchange usually containing only a single elicitation or lasting 30 seconds or less), and Interchange (prolonged sequence of verbal and/or physical interaction containing two or more elicitations). As can be seen, these five categories comprise an hierarchical ordering of involvement. Each of the ten minute protocols were coded in thirty second segments, resulting in twenty codings per protocol. Interjudge reliability was established between the researcher who made the observations and the initial codings, and a graduate

student specializing in the Education of Infants and Toddlers. A 77.5% agreement rate was obtained.

Results

The proportion of time spent in each of the five categories of social interaction by age are presented in Table I. Raw scores were first subjected to a log transformation to adjust for skewness in frequency data and to compensate for the ipsitive nature of the data. A MANOVA was computed for the five categories of the social code by two levels of sex and five levels of age yielding a significant F value for age ($F=2.9$, $p=<.0001$). Univariate F-tests yielded significant values for Watches ($F=5.18$; $df=4,40$; $p=<.002$) and Parallel Play ($F=12.45$; $df=4,40$; $p=<.000001$). The Tukey test was utilized for comparisons among the means. In the Watches category, the youngest 6-12 months group had significantly higher scores than those in the 24-30 and 30-36 months groups, with frequencies descending with age. In the Parallel Play category, the 6-12 months old group was significantly lower than all other age groups.

Discussion

Developmental considerations help explain some of the results. The finding that infants from 6-12 months old spent significantly more time than toddlers from 24

to 36 months watching people and events is undoubtedly related to the fact that for the most part the infants are not yet ambulatory. Approximately 50% of their time was spent in either solitary play or watching others. Much of the remainder of their time was spent, however, in interactions or interchanges. Twenty-nine percent of their time was spent in interactions or interchanges with an adult. Clearly, the child to caregiver ratio influences contact with adults. Typically in Japanese day care settings the ratio for caregiver to infants is 1:3. This is consistent with ratios found in quality American settings.

Children from 12 to 36 months were found to spend significantly more time engaged in parallel play than infants under age one. While this finding can be explained in part by development, culture or environment appears to be a factor. The onset of parallel play appears to be earlier for children in group care than home-reared children, as group care settings provide ample opportunities for such play behavior to emerge. In the Japanese setting, however, children as young as 12 to 18 months were spending a substantial proportion of observed time engaged in parallel play--approximately a fifth of their time. This finding was undoubtedly influenced by such Japanese practices as providing most of the children with similar play materials at the same time, and

encouraging group rhythmic movement and exercises. Such practices provide children with common experiences promoting a sense of group membership. These practices may also enhance and possibly accelerate the development of certain patterns of social interaction. Comparable cross-cultural data need to be gathered to shed further light on this possibility.

Table I

Proportion of Time Spent in each Social Interaction Category by Age (in months)

Ages	Solitary	Watches	Parallel Play	Inter-acts.	Inter-changes
6-12	27.00	23.75	3.75	14.75	30.75
12-18	23.25	15.00	18.25	16.50	27.00
18-24	20.75	10.00	22.50	19.00	27.75
24-30	20.75	9.50	22.00	11.75	36.00
30-36	16.50	5.25	32.00	13.50	32.75

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